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SITUATIONAL FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE SELECTION PROCESS.

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THIS PAPER DISCUSSES CERTAIN SITUATIONAL FACTORS CONSIDERED IMPORTANT TO THE TEACHER SELECTION PROCESS. THE DISCUSSION FOCUSES ON THREE MAJOR TOPICS--(1) IDENTIFICATION OF SITUATIONAL FACTORS RELEVANT TO TEACHER SELECTION, (2) SITUATIONAL FACTORS PRESENTED TO SUBJECTS IN AN EXPERIMENT CONDUCTED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, AND (3) POTENTIAL MANIPULATION OF SITUATIONAL FACTORS IN OTHER EXPERIMENTS ON TEACHER SELECTION. THE IMPORTANCE OF SITUATIONAL FACTORS TO TEACHER BEHAVIOR AND TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS IS EMPHASIZED, AND TEACHER BEHAVIOR IN SITUATIONAL CONTEXTS IS RELATED TO THE TEACHER SELECTION PROCESS. THE IDENTIFICATION OF SITUATIONAL FACTORS FOR THE EXPERIMENT IN THE SIMULATED SITUATION INCLUDES ASPECTS OF THE LOCATION AND PHYSICAL SETTING OF THE COMMUNITY, THE NATURE OF THE COMMUNITY, THE SCHOOL DISTRICT, THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, AND THE VACANCY ITSELF. IT IS FOUND THAT THE INTERACTING EFFECTS OF SITUATIONAL VARIABLES COMPRISING A GIVEN SITUATION NECESSITATE CRITERIA OF TEACHER SELECTION BASED ON THOSE BEHAVIORS DESIGNATED BY THE LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT AS DESIRABLE FOR THAT SITUATION. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED TO THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (CHICAGO, FEBRUARY 8-10, 1968). (HW)

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AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
Annual Meeting, February, 1968

Symposium:

Information Variables Affecting Decisions Regarding the Selection of Teachers *

Chairman:

Glenn C. Boerrigter, U. S. Office of Education

Participants:

Situational Factors to be Considered in the Selection Process
Dale Palmer, University of Washington

Personality and Behavioral Characteristics Pertinent to Selection Teachers
Michael Hickey, University of Washington

The Format and Processing of Information in the Selection Process
Donald Bauthues, University of Washington

The Effect of Various Information Formats on Decisions to Select Teachers
Dale L. Bolton, University of Washington

Discussant:

Julian C. Stanley, Johns Hopkins University

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SITUATIONAL FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss certain situational factors* considered important to the teacher selection process. More specifically, the discussion will focus on three major topics: (a) identification of situational factors relevant to teacher selection; (b) situational factors which were presented to subjects in an experiment recently conducted at the University of Washington; and (c) potential manipulation of situational factors in other experiments regarding teacher selection.

Situational Factors Relevant to Teacher Selection

All personnel selection decisions, including teacher selection decisions, imply predictions of on-the-job behavior. For years, predictions of on-the-job behavior were based on the direct linking of predictors (i.e., various measures of individual differences) with so-called criteria (i.e., various measures of organizational consequences or job "success") through a simple index of relationship, the correlation coefficient. Such predictions were based on some global measure of the "good" teacher. The problem with this type of selection was that the global "good" teacher was successful in certain circumstances and not successful in other circumstances. This dilemma caused a re-examination of the oversimplified model on which the teacher-selection process was based.

The goal of the selection process is to choose those applicants who will evidence the behaviors determined by the school district to constitute successful teaching. The specification of precise criteria of teacher effectiveness in the multiple dimensions of teacher behavior is necessary, even though this specification may vary from district to district.

Although there has been much effort made to find criteria that are universally applicable, more than a half-century of research has not yielded meaningful, measurable criteria of teacher effectiveness which the majority of the nation's educators can support (Mitzel, 1960). This lack of acceptance has been due in part to the earlier models of teacher effectiveness which were concerned only with the relationship of predictors and criteria variables. The parallel between the early models of teacher effectiveness and teacher selection clearly indicates the intention of selecting the global "good" teacher and of measuring the effectiveness by using the same type of global criteria.

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*Situational factors are any macro-elements of a local situation within which a teacher behaves that might affect the teacher's or the pupils' behavior. In this paper, there will be no discussion of situational factors that may have contributed to the teacher's behavior prior to entrance into teaching in the local situation; rather, the concern is with those external aspects of the teaching situation which affect her behavior by interacting with characteristics that she brings to the situation.

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More recent paradigms consider the complexities of predicting both teacher effectiveness and behavior by including intervening variables. Three such paradigms which include the identification of intervening variables are noted:

1. Mitzel's (1957) paradigm includes contingency factors consisting of two variables: (a) Environmental variables (e.g., school location, school size, school organization, school plant and equipment, and community economic factors): and (b) Pupil variables (e.g., attitudes, interests, and abilities). Mitzel concluded that these contingency factors modify and influence the whole complex of behaviors which enter into the educational process.

2. Biddle's (1964) model for teacher effectiveness postulates that two variables "imbed" (and interact) with the total educational sequence. The contextual variables (classroom situations and school and community contexts) contain both physical and social elements which constrain classroom interaction and are not directly under the teacher's control.

3. A major assumption of Ryans' (1960) theory regarding teacher characteristics is that teacher behavior is a function of situational factors and characteristics of the individual teacher. Ryans' model of teacher behavior traces the <u>general social situation or environment</u> (e.g., conventions and value of social groups, and curricular objectives of a particular school system) in which the teacher functions to the <u>unique features</u>(e.g., particular subject matter, specific pupil or groups of pupils, and specific activity) of specific teaching situations.

Although the nature and extent of the significance of situational factors has not been entirely verified by empirical evidence, studies which have been completed tend to support the various paradigms. Knox (1956) found certain categories of the environment which appeared to be closely related to efficiency in teaching. They were instructional materials, the students, the faculty, and the school organization. The findings of the Kansas City teacher-role studies summarized by Rosencranz and Biddle (1964) further supported the complexity of situational factors (specifically in relation to differing expectations of persons interacting with teachers) which influence the teacher's behavior both in and outside the classroom. Ryans (1960) found teacher characteristics differed for schools of varying size, for communities of differing size, and for communities with differing socio-economic status. (There was no suggestion that the relationship between these situational factors and teacher characteristics was causal.) Kleinman (1960) found in a study of situational factors regarding teacher satisfaction that the degree of teacher's knowledge of situational factors prior to accepting a teaching position was positively related to the degree of teacher satisfaction.

The paradigms and studies cited clearly indicate the importance of situational factors regarding teacher behavior and effectiveness; and if these situational factors are important in determining teacher behavior and effectiveness, then they are also important to teacher selection. The review further suggests the situational factors in Figure 1 as existing in all communities, school systems, school buildings, and classrooms. Although the factors are categorized into four separate groups, each grouping is interdependent with each larger social group.

Figure 1
Situational Factors

Community (S_4)
- Nature (including beliefs, traditions, business and industry, religions)
- Size
- Expectations
- Support of schools
- Aspirations
- Laws and Customs

School System (S_3)
- Administrative expectations
- Decision-making process
- Local School Board (including its nature and expectations)

School (S_2)
- Physical Characteristics
- Staff Characteristics
- Instructional Program
- Principal's Role and Characteristics
- Supportive Personnel's Role
- Size

Classroom (S_1)
- Physical Characteristics
- Pupil Characteristics
- Instructional Program
- Instructional Materials
- Size

Identification of situational factors, while necessary to developing criteria for teacher selection, is not sufficient for determining their effect on selection decisions. Several other questions need to be answered at the local level: Which situational factors are considered important? To what degree are the various situational factors considered important? Are there situational factors which vary but do not affect teacher behavior? In what way does the situation influence behavior?

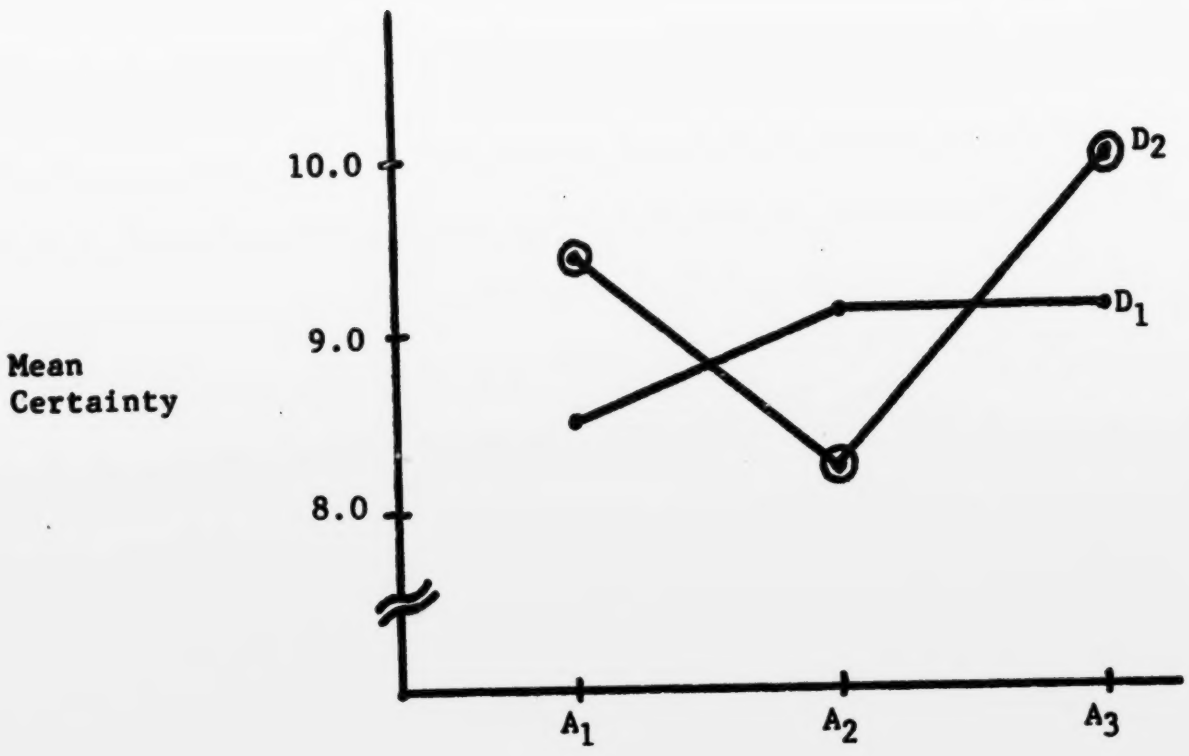


Figure 3. The Interaction Effect of Interview Information (A) and Documents (D) on Certainty of Estimates on The Teacher Evaluation Instrument.

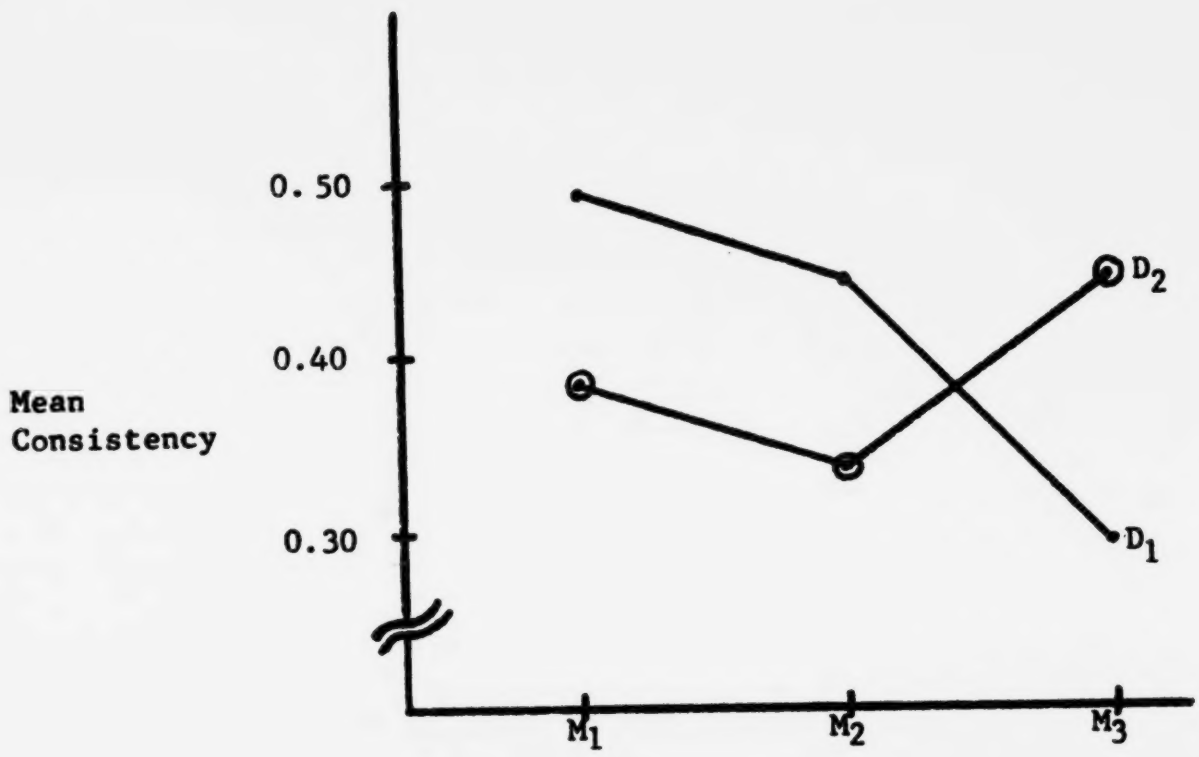
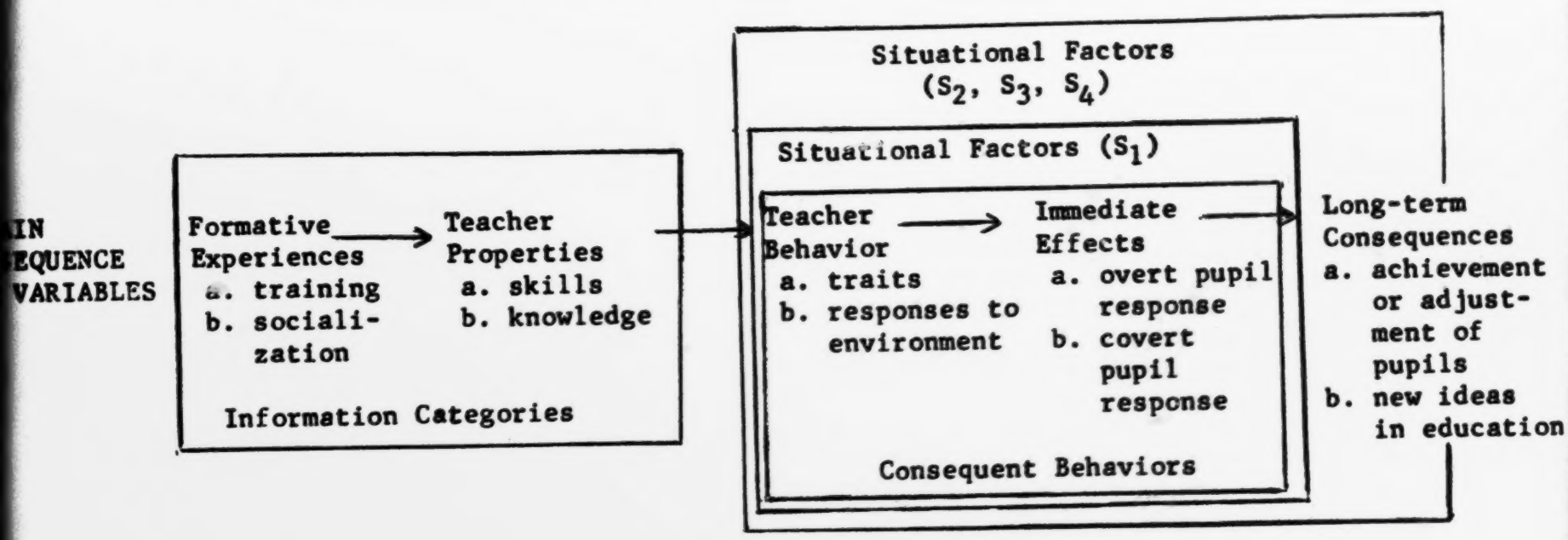


Figure 4. The Interaction Effect of Masking (M) and Documents (D) on Consistency of Estimates on The Teacher Evaluation Instrument.

Incorporating the identified situational factors in a model which illustrates the relationships of the situational variables to other variables seems possible and desirable from the previous discussion. The model in Figure 2 is an adaptation of the Biddle (1962) model of teacher effectiveness. The same assumptions are made in this model as in the original model, viz., the main sequence variables have a cause-and-effect relationship and the situational factors interact with the main sequence variables.

Figure 2
Model of Relationship of Situational Variables to Other Variables



The model may function in the following manner:

a. The Information Categories are a combination of Formative Experiences and Teacher Properties. Information data are such items as biographical information on application forms and credentials, test scores, college grades, interview information, and ratings by persons who know the applicant. Any or all of the suggested information may be utilized.

b. The Consequent Behavior, e.g., verbal expression, empathy, buoyancy, are the behaviors exhibited in job-related activities in a given district. S_1 is separated from other situational categories because of its proximity to the teaching activities and its immediate effect on the teacher.

c. The utility or desirability of applicants would be the value of Consequent Behaviors, considering the interacting variables of ($S_1 \ldots_4$) for a given position. For example, a fourth-grade position may require a greater degree of empathy than a Junior class of advanced algebra, or a rural community may require greater community participation than a suburban community.

d. Concurrent validation of the selection process would be possible by using the employed teachers in similar classroom situations in a given school system. A problem may exist in this type of validation, in that if all situations are unique, then separate predictions of behavior must be made for each situation.

Situational Factors in an Experiment

An experiment, recently conducted at the University of Washington, utilized a simulated situation for the study of teacher-selection decisions. On the assumption that selection decisions are mediated by the situational variables, it was decided that relevant situational variables would be controlled in the experiment. More specifically, the purpose of providing a complete description of the hypothetical situation was to: (a) remove the subjects from their own situation and place them in a controlled situation; and (b) allow the subjects to determine criteria appropriate for selection in the given situation.

A determination of the situational context was made following a review of the literature and discussions with an advisory panel.* Constraints of time for displaying the situation and the desirability of having the subjects retain adequate information regarding the situation necessitated a concise description of the most relevant factors which would satisfy the stated purposes. Weighting factors were assigned to each of five sections in the situational presentations. The relative importance of the section to the decisions to be made and the percentage of time to be devoted to each section was determined by a concensus of the research team and the advisory panel. The outline below indicates the situational content and the relative weighting per section:

SECTION ONE - LOCATION AND PHYSICAL SETTING OF THE COMMUNITY (Weighting - 5 percent)

I. Location
II. Geographic Features
III. Areas or Districts in the Community
IV. Population

SECTION TWO - NATURE OF THE COMMUNITY (Weighting - 20 percent)

I. History
II. Recent Changes
III. Growth Characteristics
IV. Effects of Growth
V. Community Leadership
VI. Religious Groups and Activities
VII. Recreational Facilities
VIII. Health and Safety Agencies

*The advisory panel consisted of school personnel administrators, and professors of personnel, elementary education, research methodology, and higher education.

SECTION THREE - COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT (Weighting - 20 percent)

I. History of District
II. Local School Board Characteristics
III. Central Administrative Structure
IV. Physical Facilities
V. Student Body Characteristics
VI. Educational Program
VII. Financial Support
VIII. Future Needs

SECTION FOUR - THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (Weighting - 25 percent)

I. Attendance Area (including pupil characteristics)
II. Physical Plant
III. Instructional Staff
    A. Age range
    B. Experience range
    C. Number
    D. Staff characteristics
IV. Principal
V. Primary Program
VI. Intermediate Program

SECTION FIVE - THE VACANCY (Weighting - 30 percent)

I. Fourth-grade staff characteristics
II. Pupil grouping characteristics
III. Supportive Personnel
    A. Professional
    B. Paraprofessional
IV. Expectations of fourth-grade positions
V. Room description
VI. Pupil-Progress reporting
VII. Instructional program

The situational description was then created for a hypothetical community using the outline as a guide. Following the completion of the written description, the manner in which the situation could be displayed to subjects in the experiment was considered as a major problem because of the time and retention constraints. To satisfy the requirements of time, retention, and an assurance of uniform presentation, it was decided an audio description would be tape recorded and 2 x 2 color slides would accompany the description. This situational presentation deviated from the usual taped commentary and slide combination in that the commentary content was determined to be the more essential element of the combination and the visual portion of secondary importance. The commentary was thus presented continuously and the slides were shown at appropriate intervals.

Since one of the controlled requirements of the experiment was an adequate degree of retention, some method was necessary to test the knowledge of the situation as presented via the taped commentary and slides. Isolated testing, i.e., without some provision for feedback and reinforcement, seemed inappropriate for assuring an adequate degree of retention. A programed text utilizing the branching technique was devised which presented essentially the same content as the taped commentary. The text was structured to provide immediate feedback to the selected response and to allow the subjects to move through the program with minimum effort if correct responses were selected. On completion of the two tasks, viz., listening to the taped commentary while viewing accompanying slides and completing the programed text, it was assumed the subjects were sufficiently oriented to the situation to be able to develop necessary criteria as a basis for subsequent selection decisions.

Before the situation was presented, the subjects were instructed to make certain assumptions concerning the situation and subsequent tasks of the experiment. The assumptions were:

a. Each subject was to assume the role of an administrator in the hypothetical school district, charged with the responsibility of selecting a replacement for a departing fourth-grade teacher in a particular school.

b. The time of the year was fixed at April 15 and the subjects were to select a person to begin teaching next September.

c. Those subjects receiving interview information were to assume that a screening interview was held prior to April 15; however, no information from the screening interview was available to the subjects.

d. All the applicants were graduates of the same university.

e. All the applicants had met at least the minimum state certification requirements and had at least provisional certificates.

These assumptions as well as the situational presentations were held as constant factors for all subjects in the experiment.

Potential Manipulation of Situational Factors

The simulated situational description developed for the experiment provides for the potential manipulation of a number of situational factors in additional experiments regarding teacher selection. The following situational factors seem most relevant to teacher selection and could be manipulated as independent variables in further experiments:

a. COMMUNITY

Types (Socio-economic status)
Growth characteristics
Leadership characteristics
Religious characteristics
Location (urban, suburban, rural-town, city)
Size

b. SCHOOL SYSTEM

Central administrative structure
(decision-making process)
Financial support
Physical facilities

c. SCHOOL

Staff characteristics
Instructional program
Attendance area
(Socio economic status)

d. CLASSROOM

Grade level (K-12)
Pupil-grouping characteristics
Information of exact vacancy

Effects of these independent variables could be determined on several dependent variables, e. g., amount of time to make decisions, ability to discriminate among applicants, confidence of decisions, consistency of decisions, risk in making decisions, and choice of applicants.

Summary

This discussion has emphasized the importance of situational factors to teacher behavior and teacher effectiveness, and consequently has related teacher behavior in situational contexts to the teacher selection process. Universal criteria are not sufficient to account for the complexities and dynamic aspects of teacher behavior; rather, the interacting effects of situational variables comprising a given situation necessitate criteria of teacher selection based on those behaviors designated by the local school district as desirable for that situation. The identification of situational factors for an experiment in a simulated situation included aspects of the location and physical setting of the community, the nature of the community, the school district, the elementary school, and the vacancy itself. The future manipulation of some of these situational factors provide the potential for determining how these factors affect teacher-selection decisions.

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